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# CONTENTS

**LAVENDER®**

## FEATURE: HOME & GARDEN

- 40** Lake of the Isle Home Makeover
- 48** Fence: Artistic Solution to Practical Need
- 52** Vine Art: Turning the Ugly into the Beautiful

## OUR LAVENDER

- 12** From the Editor
- 14** A Word in Edgewise
- 15** Lavender Lens
- 18** Bear With Me (While I Tell You About)...

## OUR SCENE

- 20** Arts: Spotlight
- 24** Taste Buds with Pat Evans: Heyday
- 28** Music: On the Record
- 30** Barometer
- 32** Bar Showcase
- 36** Sports: Playing for the Other Team

## OUR LIVES

- 34** Leather Life

## OUR AFFAIRS

- 38** Books

## OUR HOMES

- 56** Ride Review

## OUR RESOURCES

- 61** Classifieds
- 62** The Network
- 64** Community Connection

## OUR VOICES

- 58** Skirting the Issues
- 60** Dateland
- 66** Through These Eyes

### ON THE COVER

The Summer Home & Garden Issue:  
Fitting new into a Lake of the Isles home  
makeover. Photo by Troy Thies



Page 24: Photo by Hubert Bonnet. Page 48: Photo by Mike Hnida. Page 52: Photo by David Cook.  
Page 56: Photo by Randy Stern.

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## CONTRIBUTORS



E.B. BOATNER



PAT EVANS



ED HUYCK



ELLEN KRUG



STEVE LENIUS



CARLA  
WALDEMAR



JOHN TOWNSEND



RANDY STERN



JENNIFER  
PARELLO



SHANE LUECK



NELL  
GELHAUS



JUSTIN JONES

# LAVENDER®

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### Editorial

**Managing Editor** Andy Lien 612-436-4671

**Editorial Assistants** Linda Raines 612-436-4694,  
Shane Lueck 612-436-4692

**Editor Emeritus** Ethan Boatner 612-436-4670

**Editorial Associate** George Holdgrafer 612-436-4672

**Copy Editor** Bridget Rocheford-Kearney

**Contributors** Pat Evans, Nell Gelhaus, Ed Huyck, Justin Jones,  
Brandon McCray, Ellen Krug, Steve Lenius, Jennifer Parello,  
John Townsend, Carla Waldemar, Randy Stern, Shane Lueck,  
Kathleen Watson

### Advertising

**Sales & Advertising Director** Barry Leavitt 612-436-4690

**Senior Account Executive** Suzanne Farrell 612-436-4699

**Account Executives** Robert Felton 612-436-4697, Richard  
Kranz 612-436-4675, Anton Reichl 612-436-4695

**Advertising Associate** George Holdgrafer 612-436-4672

**Sales & Advertising Traffic Coordinator**

Linda Raines 612-436-4694

**Sales Appointments** Michelle Ulmer 612-436-4693

**Classifieds** Suzanne Farrell 612-436-4699

**National Sales Representative** Rivendell Media  
212-242-6863

### Creative

**Creative Director** Hubert Bonnet 612-436-4678

**Graphic Designer** Mike Hnida 612-436-4679

**Photographer** Sophia Hantzes

**Lavender Studios** Hubert Bonnet, Mike Hnida,  
Austin Lindstrom

### Administration

**Publisher** Lavender Media, Inc.

**President & CEO** Stephen Rocheford 612-436-4665

**Vice President & CC** Pierre Tardif 612-436-4666

**Chief Financial Officer** Carolyn Lima 612-436-4664

**Administrative Assistant** Austin Lindstrom 612-436-4661

**Founders** George Holdgrafer, Stephen Rocheford

**Inspiration** Steven W. Anderson (1954-1994), Timothy J. Lee  
(1968-2002), Russell Berg (1957-2005), Kathryn Rocheford  
(1914-2006), Jonathan Halverson (1974-2010), Adam  
Houghtaling (1984-2012), Walker Pearce (1946-2013)

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### Lavender Media, Inc.

3715 Chicago Avenue S., Minneapolis, MN 55407

[LavenderYellowPages.com](http://LavenderYellowPages.com)

612-436-4660 **Office**

877-515-9969 **Toll Free**

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612-436-4660 **Distribution**

612-436-4698 **Advertising**

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FROM THE EDITOR | BY ANDY LIEN

# Flaunting Pride

Thank you for all of positive feedback about our big Pride Issue! I've heard it jokingly referred to as a "JCPenney catalog" due to its size, which is doubly apropos considering JCP's dedication to inclusive marketing with and for the rainbow community. I'm looking forward to reading the issue a few more times to prepare myself for the big weekend that we're entering into; I'll be downloading the Twin Cities Pride and YesterQueer apps and spiffing up my Texas. I even got a pedicure with red sparkly toenail polish. Very festive. It's a little out-of-the-box for me, as I usually choose an inconspicuous mauve, but what can I say? It's PRIDE.

Speaking of rainbows, sparkles, and all-things-festive, I recently had a conversation with a woman I've known all my life, an old family friend in rural Minnesota. While we were chatting at a kitchen table—you know, the iconic Minnesota kitchen table with some mail stacked on it, Corelle coffee cups, and a swirly white coffee carafe with lukewarm Folgers in it—the topic somehow turned to this rainbow community. Not knowing her politics (which often conflates to GLBT-awareness and -openness in my rural experiences), I didn't know how the conversation was going to go. It became apparent as we talked that her daughter lives in The Cities and has gay friends and roommates. She spoke of them kindly. Her impression of her daughter's gay friends seemed to indicate more of that wonderful halo effect that happens when people who are just plain out and living their lives have an effect on those who simply witness them. It's usually a neutral-to-positive experience for the people who are new to seeing the GLBT community, this "newness" being a generalization that can be extended to much of the population in rural areas by virtue of census statistics. Being out is a demonstration of sorts, the personal is politi-

cal. She didn't say any of this, but that was my pop-psychology analysis of her statements. I'd classify her as being open to the community.

Then she offhandedly said, "I just wish they wouldn't flaunt it."

She said it in a way that seemed like "they" meant both her daughter's roommates as well as the larger community. It wasn't negative, necessarily, but still my kneejerk reaction was to be defensive; it's that Mama Bear bristling to the mention of the "they" that is mine. In a matter of moments, I had visions of rainbows and unicorns and parading people and drag queens and the 212-page Pride Issue that I'd just sent to press with some of my blood, sweat, and tears on it. I saw the same-sex couples holding hands and kissing, the weddings in the park, the bright and loud concerts, and all the laughter. I thought of the people who come to Pride from near and far, the ones who push baby strollers to Hennepin Avenue and through Loring Park; the scantily clad folks who are actually trying to "flaunt it," the previous years of VOTE NO and marriage equality campaigns and celebration; the noises, the colors...the sounds and sights of *any* festive occasion.

Back at that small-town kitchen table, I lifted my Corelle coffee cup, took a sip of my Folgers, noticed the somewhat ostentatious sparkle of my toes, and returned her peaceful smile. She is one of the most understated people within a quiet rural community that is full of people who just don't flaunt. Anything.

And then I calmed the heck down and asked her if she'd pass me the JCPenney catalog.

Happy Pride, friends. Flaunt it if you've got it.

With you and with thanks,

*Andy*



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## Racism: Don't Fool Yourself, It Hasn't Gone Away

In a recent *Time* "Commentary," Kareem Abdul-Jabbar wrote, "More whites believe in ghosts than believe racism is a problem in America," and that Donald Sterling, Cliven Bundy, Paula Deen, and Don Imus no doubt consider themselves just "plain speaking Americans."

"Racism isn't just alive," Abdul-Jabbar concluded, "it's cloning faster than Sean Hannity can backpedal from his support of Cliven Bundy."

And so it is. Redneck Southern sheriff stereotypes have nothing on Wolfboro, New Hampshire, police commissioner Robert Copeland, who in March publicly used a racial epithet to describe President Obama. Confronted by a local newspaper, Copeland not only did not apologize for or deny saying, "that f\*\*\*ing n\*gger" but further asserted that the President "meets and exceeds my criteria for such."

Even success by a young person of color is not enthusiastically embraced. Take Kwasi Enin, the Long Island high school student who applied to, and was accepted by, all eight Ivy League institutions—Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale.

An article celebrating Enin's feat explained that over 253,472 appli-

cants applied for all eight schools for an acceptance rate of 8.925 percent, or 22,624 freshmen for the Classes of 2018.

One respondent carped, "What kind of narcissist applies to all eight schools just to make a point—because that's all this is. Wait until he finds out almost everybody...is just as smart as he is," but a sad number of comments were blatantly racist:

**Linda** "In other words, he took a regular kid's place. Just because he's smarter than other colored people doesn't mean he should get in... they just aren't as smart as regular people."

**bigred8690** "I feel sorry for the poor Jewish kid from Long Island who got rejected so this guy could get in."

**dapperqq** "Notice how these Ivy colleges are trying to fill their race based quotas. It's pretty sad to see things like this that is still going on."

Respondent **ruth dorsia**'s reasoning and geographical knowledge were particularly telling: "It's interesting that the article does not mention that his parents are immigrants from Ghana. 'long Island teen' [sic] gives readers the impression that he is African American."

Heed Abdul-Jabbar; haters and bigots haven't yet disappeared.

Congratulations, Kwasi Enin, now Yale '18: Live long and prosper! ■

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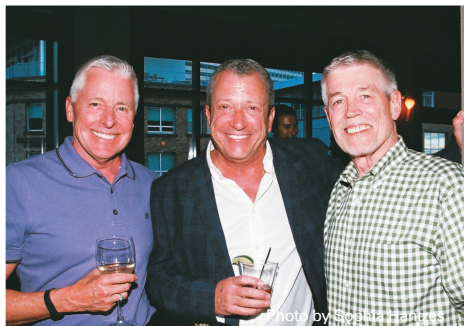
JUNE 4, 2014





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## OUR LAVENDER

"BEAR" WITH ME (WHILE I TELL YOU ABOUT)... | BY BARRY LEAVITT

### 7TH ANNUAL FRUIT BOWL

June 27 • 6:00-9:00pm

Memory Lanes • 2520 26th Ave. S., Minneapolis

Looking for alcohol and tobacco-free events during Twin Cities Pride weekend? Look no more. Hosted by the always-popular Mrs. Margie Peterson, Fruit Bowl features bowling, karaoke, prize drawings, volleyball, photography wall, and taco bar. \$5 suggested donation, but no one will be turned away for lack of funds. In order to ensure your bowling lanes and volleyball courts, RSVP to [tiffany.paulson@rainbowhealth.org](mailto:tiffany.paulson@rainbowhealth.org) or 612-206-3180. Search "7th Annual Fruit Bowl" on Facebook for more information.

### WOMAN'S CLUB PRIDE DANCE

June 28 • 8pm

Woman's Club • 410 Oak Grove St., Minneapolis

Join DJ Sheik as she spins the hottest tunes during a special Pride dance at the Woman's Club. While your there, enjoy the fireworks display going on at dusk. Tickets are \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door. Visit [www.pridedancewomansclub.eventbrite.com](http://www.pridedancewomansclub.eventbrite.com) for more information.

### RECLAIM - DILDO BINGO NIGHT

June 29 • 6-9pm

Hell's Kitchen • 80 9th St. S., Minneapolis

With a name like Dildo Bingo, you know it has to be a fun night of bingo. Enjoy great food, meeting new friends, and the chance to win some awesome prizes! Your host for this 18+ event is Tif Dynamite, and bingo cards are \$5. Best of all, your bingo paying pleasure will support RECLAIM's financially and culturally accessible therapy to LGBTQ youth and their families. Visit [www.reclaim-lgbtbyouth.org](http://www.reclaim-lgbtbyouth.org) for more information.

### LAVENDER'S FIRST THURSDAY

July 3 • 5:30-8pm

Burger Moe's • 242 W. 7th St., St. Paul

After Twin Cities Pride activities, attention turns to a bevy of summer events, and there's no better way to head into July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend and kicking off your summer than enjoying a summer evening on the Burger Moe's patio during Lavender's July First Thursday. Admission is FREE and dress code is "come as you are." They'll be drink specials, complimentary appetizers, and lots of prize drawings. Visit "Lavender's July First Thursday" on Facebook for more information.

### MIX: INDEPENDANCE

July 3 • 5pm-2am

Union Rooftop • 825 Hennepin Ave., Minneapolis

After you're done enjoying soaking up the sun and a few cocktails during First Thursday at Burger Moe's, head over to Union Rooftop where things will be heating up just as the sun goes down. It's the last MiX of the midsummer season, so join your host, Dave Em, for what's always a great party. No cover, 21+. Search "MIX: Independence!" on Facebook for more information.

### RED RIBBON RIDE

July 17-20

One of the most popular events, the Red Ribbon Ride, is also one that does so much good for our community. The Red Ribbon Ride is a 4-day, 300-mile ride for HIV/AIDS that supports 8 Minnesota AIDS service organization. This year's Ride is taking a new route, which includes stops in Belle Plaine, Mankato and Waconia. And if you can't do the Ride, come cheer the riders when they start at Mall of America and finish at the State Capitol. Visit [www.redribbonride.org](http://www.redribbonride.org) for more information. ■



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Together we'll go far







*Kom Hit!* Photo by Laura Cedarburg

## KOM HIT! (COME HERE!)

Through July 10  
American Swedish Institute, 2600 Park Av., Mpls.  
(612) 871-4907  
[www.ASI.mn.org](http://www.ASI.mn.org)

August Strindberg was one of the 19th century's most provocative writers. His views on women and class inequality reveal a man in constant turmoil. Acclaimed dancer, Sally Rousse, and physical theater wonderman, Noah Bremer, reflect that turmoil along with humor in this piece that draws its inspiration from the playwright's texts. Their stage is essentially the Turnblad Mansion better known as the American Swedish Institute.

Rousse describes: "*Kom Hit!* is a wild, roaming dance theater work inspired by characters of Strindberg's plays. It leads and chases audiences all over the three floors of the American Swedish Institute for an hour, revealing relationships and obsessions and probably a few fears. Strindberg was a dark guy! There are dances in cloak rooms, grand ballrooms, on staircases, across the courtyard, and on the terrace of the new Nelson Building. And puppetry and live music."

## LEAVES OF GRASS UNCUT

July 10 - 13  
Illusion Theater, 528 Hennepin Av., Mpls.  
(612) 339-4944  
[www.illusiontheater.org](http://www.illusiontheater.org)

In the 1980s and '90s Patrick Scully enraged and thrilled audiences with performance work at his cabaret and for the Walker Art Center, and was very much on the radar of the right

wingers who crusaded to gut the National Endowment for the Arts. Though he is a major player in recent queer history, he reminds us that queer history is long and vast. As a labor of love, he has been developing a piece about one of our formative historical figures, transcendentalist Walt Whitman (1819-1892).

**Scully on how the project started:** The initial spark was somewhat whimsical. I got several emails over a short span, all with quotes from Whitman. That got me thinking. [I remember that] my high school American Literature teacher, Barb Kallsen, in 1969, told my class that we would next be studying poetry by Walt Whitman, "known to many as the father of free verse." One of my classmates asked, "When you say Free verse, is that Free like the group at the university (referring to Fight Repression of Erotic Expression - FREE)?" She replied, "If you are asking 'Was Walt Whitman a homosexual?', yes, Walt Whitman was a homosexual." She did this as if it was not exceptional to pass on such information in a public school in the US at that time. *It was exceptional!*

**Scully on his purpose:** Most of my work has been autobio-

graphical, bringing my life as an openly gay, HIV+ man onto the stage and into the world. With this project, I continue a familiar theme, claiming space for unheard voices, while shifting to biography, to Whitman's life, bringing new material—a great poet with a fascinating story. It is the biggest project I have ever done in Minneapolis. *Leaves of Grass Uncut* will combine theater, poetry, video, photography, opera, and dance. I am 60, I was first onstage at the Walker in 1972. I am ready to bring together decades of experience in the arts for a project that is important, big, has developed over years, will continue to develop, and that I hope to perform for the rest of my life.

**Scully on erasure of queer history:** We need to know our history as queer people. Who paved the way? It did not all start at Stonewall. Our culture conspires to tell us that someone's sexuality is not important, to erase sexuality when that person, especially an important person, is not clearly heterosexual. Whitman is a prime example. Too many educated, well-read, well-meaning straight folks have been duped by this conspiracy, and have not a clue that Walt loved men. Not everyone had



*Leaves of Grass Uncut.* Photo by Sara Rubenstein





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my high school American Literature teacher.

**Scully on how this work responds to that:** I love working with men...and dance! Regarding diligence, when you do autobiographical work, no one questions your authority on the topic. When you work with biography, and someone as famous and well-studied as Whitman, the bar is a lot higher, and a lot of research is required. I have done my homework. Walt would love watching these men rehearse and dance. Whitman had to write in code. Dance, like Whitman's poetry—especially men dancing together—indicates and suggests, without explicitly stating. This is especially true of men dancing together. That is crucial. The dance vocabulary we use also reflects Whitman. The enhanced emphasis on touch and physical contact echo Whitman's body-based poetry.

**Scully on the continuum of desire:** These male dancers span the range of sexual desire, from Kinsey 1-6, and they are all happy to be dancing in this project, with all men. This would not have been radical in Whitman's time, but it is a shift in my lifetime. I do not think that, 40 years ago, Minneapolis would have had such a range of professional dancers, all men, happy to work with an out gay artist, like me, on a piece about a proto-Homo, like Whitman. Whitman had to invent to write, the words he needed did not exist. The dancers are similarly inventing these dances to deal with a wide range of male relationships, much of which I do not know verbal language for.

**Scully on the use of improvisation:** Additionally, contact improvisation, an important element of our vocabulary, challenged and ultimately enhanced the dance world in ways that very much parallel the impact of free verse on poetry. In the early days of contact dance, I frequently heard, "That's interesting movement, but it's not really dance. Where's the music? Where's the technique?" Just as Whitman heard, "That's interesting writing but it's not really poetry. Where's the rhyme? Where's the meter?"

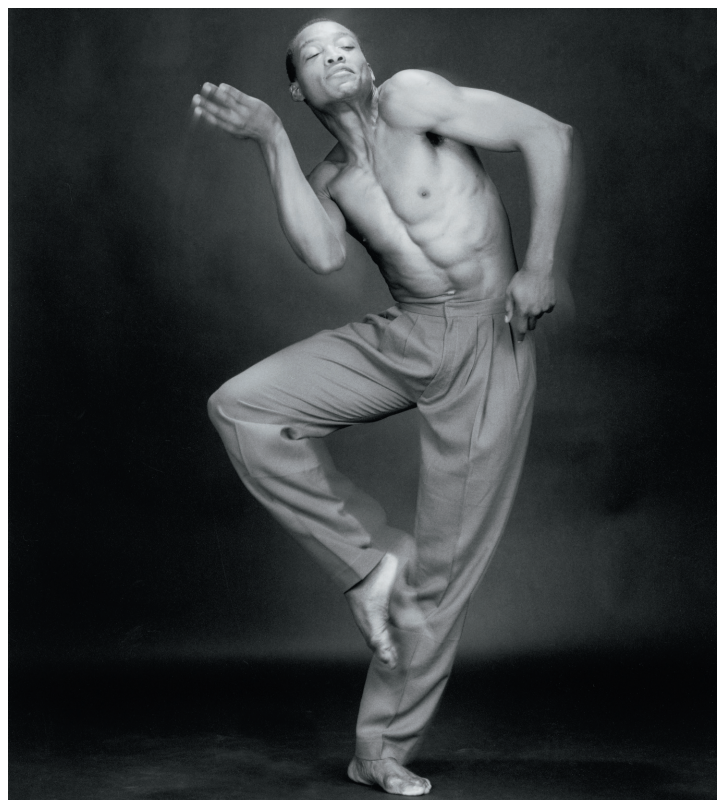
## ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE

Through July 19  
Weinstein Gallery, 908 W. 46th St., Mpls.  
(612) 822-1722  
[www.weinstein-gallery.com](http://www.weinstein-gallery.com)

Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs are a glorious mix of the grotesque, the classically gorgeous, and the erotic. He was deemed to be pornographic by Republican Senator Jesse Helms's crusade to gut the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in the Reagan-Bush era. Yet the pornographic influence on his work has actually been considered to be a legitimate and empowering quality inherent within it by many critics and academics. Major cultural figures like composer Philip Glass, singer Patti Smith, muscle model Arnold Schwarzenegger, and actors Richard Gere and Meryl Streep posed for him.

Mapplethorpe's death of AIDS in 1989 at age 43 has made some doubt the significance of his contribution, as if to praise him was simply to mouth a politically correct platitude. But the test of time has served Mapplethorpe's legacy well. His style is distinctive. Even inanimate objects that he photographed have a breathing sensuality about them.

The Mapplethorpe Foundation has made work available for the Weinstein Gallery exhibit. 25 photographs taken between 1978 and 1989 give us a classically ideal sense of proportion in human and botanical forms. Living things have their own sensual and spiritual essence in Mapplethorpe's art. He is an example of someone who was—and still would be—anti-assimilationist. Yet, paradoxically, he has come to be universally beloved a quarter century after his death.



The Photography of Robert Mapplethorpe. Photo by Robert Mapplethorpe

## SOMMERFEST

July 5 - 26  
Orchestra Hall  
1111 Nicollet Mall, Mpls.  
(612) 371-5600  
[www.minnesotaorchestra.org](http://www.minnesotaorchestra.org)

How wonderful that the Minnesota Orchestra is back in the saddle! This year's Sommerfest features concert hall classics, Broadway, and Viennese favorites. Gay composers included are Tchaikovsky, Leonard Bernstein, and Aaron Copland. The orchestra and its board were involved in heated labor disputes in recent years. It is the state's most honored art institution. It would be great for the GLBT community to celebrate that. And celebrating gay composers is a marvelous way to celebrate our legacy.

## VIOLETTE

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[www.landmarktheatres.com](http://www.landmarktheatres.com)

Paris is the epicenter of so much cultural change throughout history. After the Nazi Occupa-

tion, as World War II came to an end, it was no wonder that the great city became newly energized. At that time, several iconic figures of the Sexual Revolution emerged. Bisexual writer Violette Leduc was one of them. Emmanuelle Devos plays the feminist author in Martin Provost's acclaimed new film. The focus is on her long friendship with the woman often called The Mother of Modern Feminism, Simone de Beauvoir, author of *The Second Sex* and played in the film by Sandrine Kiberlain.

Maurice Sachs plays gay Jewish writer, Oliver Py. Leduc pretended to be his wife. Jacques Bonafie plays Jean Genet who looms as one of the great renegade literary minds of queer history. Leduc drew from much of her own turbulent life experience. Some of her major works include *The Bastard* and *In the Prison of Her Skin*. But it was *Ravages* that really ignited controversy. In it she wrote about her abortion and her first lesbian relationship. ■





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## OUR SCENE

TASTE BUDS WITH PAT EVANS | PHOTOS BY HUBERT BONNET

# Heyday



(From left): Pat Evans & Jim Christiansen.

## FOR FOODIES AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD

*It's my heyday  
my little heyday  
it's your heyday  
babadaba heyday*

And now, just like the Replacements song it was inspired by, the LynLake neighborhood is experiencing its own Heyday thanks to the new bistro which opened in late April. Located on Lyndale Avenue in the space previously occupied by Sunnyside Up Café and a laundromat, Heyday was created by culinary powerhouse restaurateurs Jim Chris-

tiansen and Lorin Zinter.

"Jim's doing great things, he's at the peak, and having the time of his life," Zinter says of his friend and business partner. "We have always worked well together because we respect each other's opinions and have been really good communicators, of course it's probably a matter of time before I drive him crazy."

That's not likely, because there's an ease and obvious friendship between the two that seems very strong. The pair has a long history which includes helping La Belle Vie and Sea Change find their places as ac-



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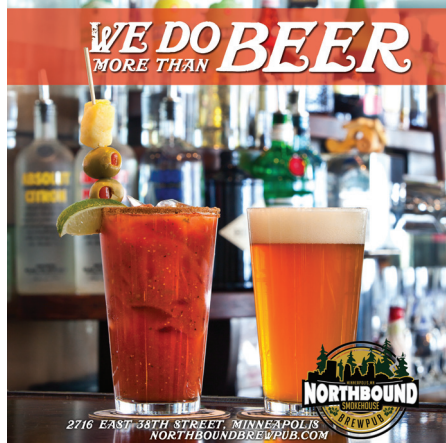
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claimed Twin Cities dining destinations.

It's been a whirlwind for both men, but especially Christiansen who married his longtime partner, Jon Kuskie, just two weeks after opening the restaurant. "It was pretty absurd to be honest," he says. "The reason we did it was because it was Jon and my eleventh anniversary. Jon happened to be at an event with Mayor Betsy Hodges and asked her if she would marry us, and she said yes, so we thought, 'Let's do it.'"

It seems most of the newlywed chef's recent decisions have been spot-on. Since opening in late April, Heyday is already hitting its stride.

"We thought we were opening a really good restaurant," explains Zinter. "But the feedback we've gotten from our peers in the food community has been really overwhelming and humbling. We've had chefs, sous chefs, and general managers coming in and raving about the food and the space. It makes us feel really wonderful."

Christiansen admits the hardest question he keeps fielding is about



the style of food. "I like the description of a Minneapolis bistro," he says. "There's definitely a French influence, but even more so a casualness to the restaurant. And that I hope translates to the food as well. Great quality ingredients with some fun put into it."

Returning to the open kitchen in the chic rustic dining room, Christiansen quickly whipped up several

of his favorite menu items for me to taste, pictured here.

About the future: "A year from now, I want everyone to still be working here and to still be filled with a sense of excitement and be driving themselves forward," Zinter says while leaning up to his enormous marble-topped bar. "Same for me," chimes in an enthusiastic Christiansen. Like the song says, "it's my heyday, it's your heyday," and they are savoring every moment of it. ■

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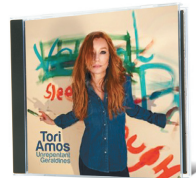
## OUR SCENE

ARTS & CULTURE | ON THE RECORD | BY ED HUYCK



### MAYDA AND NEVIATOR *Busy Signals 1*

The local fave presents the first half of a new album. One that is musically and lyrically inspired by recent trips, including one to South Korea to meet her birth family. These seven tracks feature an oppressive, heavy vibe that still drives the listener to move. It gets off to a fiery start with "Promise," before settling into a more measured vibe through the rest of the mini-lp. Producer Neviator works with Mayda to build complex bases for each of the songs. While those are often compelling, sometimes the vocals are mixed too far in the background, making it hard to follow where each song is going. Still, there is considerable emotional weight here, especially in the one-two middle-album punch of "Nightingale" and "Shadow Shake."



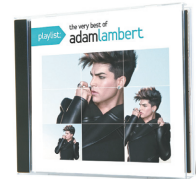
### TORI AMOS *Unrepentant Geraldines*

More than two decades into her career, it's easy to take Tori Amos for granted. The singer-songwriter has cut an impressive course across music in that time, never losing sight of the strong songwriting and unique voice that brought her to the fore in the first place. Like most of Amos' recent albums, *Unrepentant Geraldines* is merely an excellent collection of songs that are brought together by relentless attention to quality from the songwriter and her musical supporting crew. Breathless, somber, playful and aggressive—sometimes in the very same song—these 14 songs are loaded with Amos' signature gifts. The spell is woven in the opening one-two punch of "America" and "Trouble's Lament" and lasts long after the final notes of "Invisible Boy" have ended.



### CHROMEO *White Women*

Sometimes, finding out about a band can shatter illusions. Listening to the filthy funk and '80s-style beats on *White Women*, I envisioned an act decked out in Rick James' best leather, hitting the nightspots at every turn. Instead, Dave 1 has a PhD (!) in French literature (!!), while P-Thugg is actually the less-intriguingly named Patrick Gemayel. Oh well, at least I can have my illusions fueled by this bouncy and quintessentially summer collection of dance-floor jams. The duo bring in help, from members of Vampire Weekend and LCD Soundsystem to Solange Knowles, while all the while dancing the retro fine line, embracing the past without recreating it. Anyway, there's even a Minneapolis shout-out (well flight announcement) in the late-album jam, "Frequent Flyer."



### ADAM LAMBERT *The Very Best*

It's odd enough for an artist to issue a "greatest hits" collection two albums into his career, especially one that is struggling like Lambert's. The big attraction here is a trio of *American Idol* performances that pushed the singer into the public's mind. Like most of *American Idol*, they sound like high-quality karaoke, with only "Mad World" sounding at all genuine. Lambert's skills as a singer typically are the best attraction here, while the often-flat songwriting makes this a rather dry and subdued collection of supposed hits (chart wise, the best any of them did was #10). It closes with a cover of Lady Gaga's "Marry the Night" that might have been fun, except for damage done by another past-its-prime Fox show, *Glee*. ■



CRAVE ROOFTOP PRIDE PARADE PARTY

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## OUR SCENE

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# Gay 90's Offers Pride Weekend Cornucopia

As always, the Gay 90's, which has been a perennially popular GLBT community bar since 1957, offers a Pride Weekend cornucopia this year. With six bars under one roof, the theme is, appropriately enough, "Size Does Matter." Every night, the Gay 90's features food and dining, but be sure to make reservations well in advance. The establishment is open to everyone 18-plus.

### Thursday, June 26

The highlight is the annual Miss City of the Lakes Pageant in the La Femme Show Lounge, which the Gay 90's has hosted since 1995. Be there to see whom the lovely Geneva Richards will crown as her successor. Another featured event is the Pride Dominatrix Gala with Mistress Jean Bardot.

### Friday, June 27

The sizzling place to be is the special Pride Foam Party in the Dance Annex, featuring fab DJ Nater D presiding over dancing to keep you tired on your feet. In the La Femme Show Lounge, it's the ever-superb drag revue with Show Director Nina Di Angelo and company.

### Saturday, June 28

Special guests BeBe Zahara Benet, the first winner of RuPaul's Drag Race, and Asia O'Hare headline the La Femme Drag Show. Dance the night away in the Dance Annex and the Retro Bar. Don't miss the male dancers in the Men's Room bar.

### Sunday, June 29

Sunday morning, enjoy the scrumptious Pride Parade Breakfast Buffet in the main bar, then watch the parade itself, which goes down Hennepin Avenue right past the Gay 90's. Once again, the La Femme drag show provides some of the best entertainment around. ■

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# Impressions of International Mr. Leather Weekend, 2014

The 36th edition of the International Mr. Leather (IML) contest weekend was held May 22-26, 2014, in Chicago. This was the 21st time your humble columnist has attended. In those 21 years I have seen many changes to the event. Yet the basics—masculine men in masculine attire, who also happen to be great guys with noble hearts—have remained the same. No wonder I keep coming back every year. The following is my impressionistic take on the 2014 IML weekend's events.

## Thursday Evening

It's the unofficial kickoff to the International Mr. Leather weekend: a "roast" of Andy Cross and Oil Tan Sam, the outgoing International Mr. Leather 2013 and International Mr. Bootblack 2013 titleholders. The roast is held in the auditorium of the Leather Archives & Museum.

When the IML first and second runners-up are two of the people doing the roasting, fireworks are almost assured, and the evening does not disappoint. The knives are out and the claws are sharpened. Sacred cows are gored, secrets are betrayed, and canonical leather beliefs are blasphemed.

No one escapes unscathed—the titleholders being roasted, the people on stage doing the roasting, some people in the audience, and even a few people who weren't even in attendance. But it's all in good fun and all for a good cause (the event benefits the Leather Archives & Museum). Along with the bitchiness, there is an awful lot of love on that stage.

## Friday Evening

All 46 of this year's contenders for the International Mr. Leather title are introduced at the official IML opening ceremonies. Then it's time to party. The entire fourth floor of the hotel has been turned into Leather Central for the evening. While a silent auction benefiting the Leather Archives & Museum goes on in the hall, three ballrooms are filled with revelers at the San Francisco Party and Gear Blast. Approaching one of the ballrooms, I'm hit by blasts of both body heat and thumping sound waves.

Inside I see men in unitards, latex, leather aprons, sports gear, plush-headed cartoon costumes, kilts, harnesses, jocks, fatigues,



Left to right: IML first runner-up Steve Dupont; International Mr. Leather 2014 Ramien Pierre; International Mr. Bootblack 2014 Scout; and IML second runner-up Cody Troy.

spandex, cowboy gear, superhero suits, adult "boys" and human "pups" on leashes. The tribe is enjoying itself. I see all ages and all body types, and everyone seems to respect everyone else—it's all good.

The music is not as loud as it has been in years past, so conversation is possible. I meet some men from Minneapolis and ask them if they have been to the Leather Market yet. They reply, "Only for necessities."

I work my way down to the hotel lobby to see what's going on there. The elevators are slow and infrequent and crowded with their own kind of (hot and sweaty) fun. The lobby is crowded, too. A table holds printed promotional flyers for vendors and events, but the table is half the size it has been in years past—perhaps more promotion is being done online? Next to the table is a cardboard box the size of a 55-gallon drum, and it is half-filled with condoms. (Tomorrow I will see two men refilling the box to the brim.)

## Saturday, Leather Market

I run into a gentleman who is attending IML for the first time, and he is blown away by the size of the Leather Market. "I was expecting maybe a dozen vendors set up in the lobby," he says. Instead he found a Leather Market filling two hotel ballrooms on the fifth and seventh

floors of the host hotel (with an express escalator between the two floors). The Market is filled with 120 vendors selling all manner of leather and fetish goods. There is the expected (leather apparel, boots, paddles) and the unexpected (impressive iron dungeon beds and slings made from truck tires). The Leather Market welcomes 6,000 visitors each day it is open.

## Saturday Afternoon

History is made as IML founder and Executive Producer Chuck Renslow officiates at the first legal same-sex wedding ever held at IML.

## Sunday

This year's IML Contest and Show is held at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance in Chicago's Millennium Park. The 46 contestants are introduced and then, based on preliminary judging, the top 20 finalists are announced. Each of the finalists shows his serious side by making a 90-second speech while dressed in formal leather. Each contestant also shows his playful side by getting a chance to own the stage and seduce the audience while wearing as little leather as possible.

While the judges' scores are being tallied, the IML audience is entertained by—a string quartet? Yes, but the group, Well Strung, is not just any string quartet. Dressed in leather and displaying impressive physiques, these four classically trained musicians sing four-part boy-band harmonies while accompanying themselves on two violins, a cello, and a viola. The audience absolutely loves them—I even hear many audience members singing along.

At last, the winners are announced. Second runner-up is Cody Troy, Mr. Midwest Leather 2013; first runner-up is Steve Dupont, Mr. New England Leather 2014; and the new International Mr. Leather 2014 is Ramien Pierre, Mr. DC Eagle 2014.

In the theater lobby after the contest, and on the bus back to the hotel, I see people taping out the news of the contest results on their jungle drums (also known as mobile phones). Once again, the tribe has a new leader for the year. Let the party continue. ■





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# Playing for the Other Team: Have We Got a Group For You!

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"Too much of a good thing can be wonderful." Didn't Mae West say it best?

It is definitely a good thing to have dozens of GLBT-friendly sports-oriented support groups popping up across the country—in the big leagues, and at college campuses and high schools alike. With so many to choose from, and each with their own focus (and catchy name/slogan), it's helpful to know the details of who's who and what's what.

"But Nell, I don't have time to do all that research!"

Huh, well, I'm not doing anything at the moment, so allow me. Below are a few groups that might be helpful resources for those with specific areas of interest.

**What if I'm a high school or college athlete, struggling with the decision to come out, or looking for peers to share my story with?**

*GO! (Generation Out) Athletes* might be just the organization for you. Founded by a group of GLBT college athletes, GO! Athletes' primary purpose is to connect GLBTQ student athletes with other GLBTQ athletes and to serve as a united voice to encourage schools to create safe and inclusive environments. They share athlete stories on their website to help students feel empowered to come out and support each other. GO! Athletes has spoken on panels, hosted events, and is led by a strong advisory team, including Anna Aagenes, a former Division I athlete, and GO!'s Executive Director.

**What if I'm a professional athlete, looking to voice my support for the GLBT community?**

*Athlete Ally* is home to outspoken GLBT allies such as Chris Kluwe, Brendon Ayanbadejo, and numerous others. Founded by straight college wrestler Hudson Taylor (who would wear HRC's Equal logo on his headgear during matches), Athlete Ally's main focus is educating

allies in the athletic community and encouraging them to take a stand. They provide public awareness campaigns and educational programming to foster inclusive sports communities, and mobilize who they refer to as "Ambassadors" at the pro, Olympic, and collegiate levels to create supportive environments for GLBT athletes in their specific athletic environments.

**What if I'm a high school coach or physical education teacher, searching for resources to assist me in creating a safe space for all student athletes?**

*Changing The Game: The GLSEN Sports Project* (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network) is led by Pat Griffin, a well-known GLBT advocate and author. Griffin is Professor Emeritus in the Social Justice Education Program at the University of Massachusetts – Amherst and author of *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sports*. The GLSEN Sports Project's mission is "to assist K-12 schools in creating and maintaining an athletic and physical education climate that is based on the core principles of respect, safety and equal access for all, regardless of sexual orientation of gender identity/expression." (<http://sports.glsen.org>) Their website contains numerous downloadable resources and checklists for coaches and educators, as well as a collection of "Game Changers" videos of people who have made an impact in schools across the country.

**What if I'm a college athletic director, and I want to be sure our programs are welcoming?**

The *You Can Play Project* has made an impact in colleges and professionals sports organizations with their video series, locally seen at UW-Superior, which promote the slogan, "If you can play, you can play." Founded by Patrick Burke, Brian Kitts, and Glenn Witman (after the death of Patrick's gay brother Brendan in a car accident), the Project is now headed by Wade Davis, an openly gay retired NFL corner-

back. YCP challenges locker room culture by shifting the focus to each athlete's skills and work ethic, not their sexual orientation, hence their mantra. Information on how to make a video at your university can be found on their website, with close to a hundred examples from participatory programs for inspiration.

*Br/ache the Silence* is another organization devoted to offering training and workshops that focus on best practices and policy recommendations to assist administrators in supporting student athletes and colleagues. Co-founders Nevin Caple and Colleen McCaffrey offer ideas for campus initiatives, diversity consulting, and a platform for public awareness, and includes links to the NCAA publication "The Champions of Respect: Inclusion of GLBTQ Student-Athletes and Staff in NCAA Programs."

There are many more. The *NCLR Sports Project* run by national championship basketball coach Helen Carroll, *Project I Am Enough* by transgender athlete Kye Allums, HRC's *Athletes for Equality*, the *Federation of Gay Games*, the *Stand Up Foundation*, *GForce Sports*—the list goes on and on. Many of these organizations have come together to form the *LGBT Sports Coalition*, which recently held the 3rd Annual LGBT Sports Summit, sponsored by Nike and their #BeTrue campaign, in Portland, Oregon.

Anna Aagenes, of Go! Athletes, was one of many who attended. "We had an incredible group of 'game-changers' attend this year's Nike LGBT Sports Summit and it felt as though everyone left Portland more inspired and more committed to advancing the LGBT sports equality movement than they did before the Summit. Though I was thrilled to return for a third year and represent GO! Athletes, the best part of the Summit was seeing how many more powerful young people are involved in our movement. Their voices and their stories are changing the sports world for coaches, students, and fans who are looking for acceptance and a truly equal playing field."

Mae West would find that to be wonderful, indeed. ■





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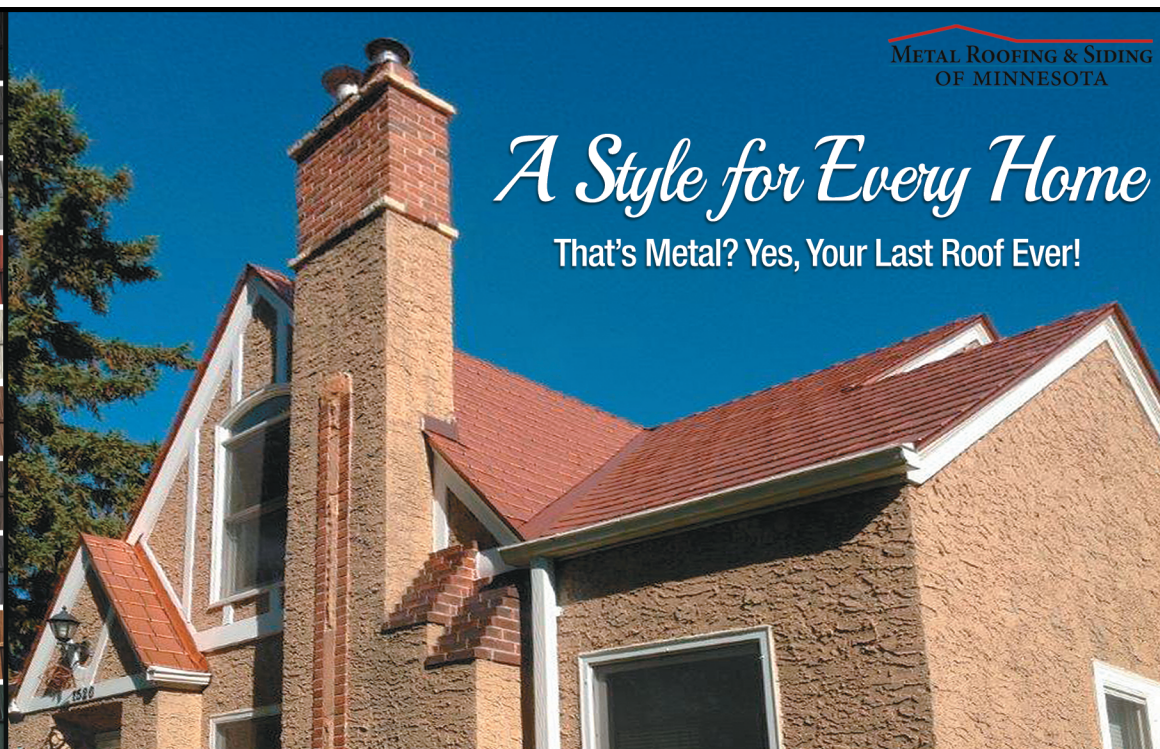
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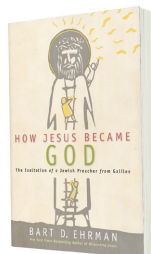
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### *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee*

Bart D. Ehrman  
Harper One  
\$27.99



"Christians insisted that they believed in only one God, and yet they revered Jesus as divine and worshipped their 'Lord Jesus' along with God," writes Ehrman, and this current fascinating exercise in historicity teases out how this was done. As a starting point, Ehrman, a self-professed agnostic, posits that the historical Jesus, an unlettered apocalyptic prophet, neither understood himself nor described himself as God. Further, Jesus was never considered by his earthly followers to be God, and was considered divine by them only after his raising from the dead. Neither pro- nor anti-religious belief, Ehrman pursues the historical Jesus. Bible scholar Ehrman's numerous books also include, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, and *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*.

### *Return of an Impetuous Pilot*

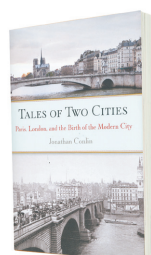
Kate McLachlan  
Regal Crest Enterprises  
\$16.95



The third delightful offering in McLachlan's Rip Van Dyke Time-Travel Series rounds up the usual suspects—Bennie and Van and Kendra and Jill, and, of course, Jill's erratic machine, RIP—along with an unexpected passenger: Amelia Erhart. The story has readers alternating between the present, 1989, and 1933, where eight-year-old Kevin, playing around RIP, has inadvertently been sent. It's January 31 in 1933 Spokane Washington, and snowing heavily. Efforts to secure Kevin's return produce only Erhart, who is so delighted with the modern world that she's reluctant to return. Erhart was, indeed, in Spokane at that time, scheduled to speak at the stately Davenport Hotel, her scheduled flight out grounded by a snowstorm. McLachlan skillfully weaves fact and fiction for a superb tale of love and high adventure.

### *Tales of Two Cities: Paris, London and the Birth of the Modern City*

Jonathan Conlin  
Counterpoint Press  
\$30



Great cities don't just spring up like Topsy, they watch and learn, borrow and adjust, while simultaneously giving of themselves to other growing metropolises. So it ever was, particularly with neighbors across the Channel, London and Paris. In this volume, Conlin examines five areas of life and livelihood in the two between 1750 and 1914, showing the surprisingly different origins of familiar things and customs: "The Restless House," "The Street," "The Restaurant," "The Dance," "The Underworld," and "Dead and Buried." In "The Underworld," we learn that natural historian Georges Cuvier's work on fossils and correlation paved the way for works on detection by first Vidocq, Gaboriau, and then, "eventually," by Conan Doyle. In like manner, the oh-so-French Can-Can was birthed in London. An agreeable read.

### *Lesbian Marriage: A Sex Survival Kit*

Kim Chernin and Renate Stendhal  
lesbiansexsurvival.com  
\$15.95



Partners and co-authors Chernin and Stendhal offer a savvy, sprightly and refreshingly down to earth guide for those married or contemplating taking the plunge. And now one can in eighteen (nineteen?) states! The book is dedicated to "Our California sisters and brothers who regained the right to same-sex marriage in June 2013." The kit is set up to explore twelve "typical, 'classical' areas of discontent," broken into "Challenge," "Let's See," and "Toolkit," offering an illustrative story, thoughts on engaging the particular problem, and a batch of Dos and Don'ts to practice. The headings describe each problem precisely: "You Always, I Never – Grudges and Bed Death," "One Roof, Four Generations – Women Who Love Too Many." Buy a copy for friends, and another, discreetly, for your bedside table. ■



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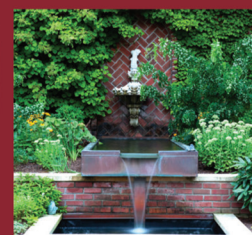
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Photo by Troy Theis

# LAKE OF THE ISLES HOME MAKEOVER

*by Carla Waldemar*

Nobody said it would be easy. “Ingenious” is the word that comes to mind. The young family yearned to remodel the stately 1915 Georgian brick home anchoring the southwest corner of Lake of the Isles Boulevard they’d purchased in 2008. Okay, that’s not so tough for a construction firm like Vujovich Design Build Inc., which specializes in renovating architecturally significant homes in South Minneapolis and Edina.

But—an addition? The home lacked a comfortable kitchen/family room space and a functional connection to the freestanding garage, plus modern-day necessities such as a mudroom and powder room that weren’t part of the picture in

1915. Oh, and a new bedroom for their infant daughter. And an exercise room. And an indoor pool. But how, and where?

All it takes is plans and money—if you’re living somewhere in the ex-ex-exurbs, anyway. If your city lot, with its exquisite, and precious, formal garden completed in the backyard in 2008 (and therefore sacred), is constrained (city streets, alley, and neighbors mean no wiggle room), that means creating a dream within an existing footprint. And that’s a whole new challenge.

The owners first called on architect Joseph Metz, principal, SALA Architects, who figured out the ‘what.’ Metzler

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42 ➔





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recommended Vujovich—on the same wave length, they'd partnered successfully many times in the past—to accomplish the 'how.' "Either Joe could design it, or we could," says co-owner and General Manager Ed Roskowsinski. "Initially there were a lot of meetings to learn, to get up to speed, to see what it'll take to create what's on paper. (Of course, many things change along the way, based on timetables.)"

Vujovich has always had its own requirements, too. No tracts, no flips, no blah. A project (and its clients) has to be

this should be fun for them, too," he reinforces. "It should be a positive experience, so they need to decide if we'll be fun to be around."

"Next, tell us—not your ideas" he stresses, "but rather, your list of needs—like, in this Lake of the Isles house. Originally it was a very formal home, with a large living room and dining room. But here's a family with young kids, wanting a family space: that's a big part of what they're looking for. Plus the existing open walkway to the garage: we



Photo by Troy Theis

"fun," insists Ed. The building team and owners, he says, have to be on the same page: "How does it feel? We all sit down around the kitchen table and talk about needs, wishes, what's comfortable. Everybody brings up questions."


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needed to solve that."

"The challenge regarding that walkway was, according to Minnesota laws on frost footing, we couldn't actually attach it." But who wants to trek that distance from the home itself—no treat in the best of weather, but particularly nasty during a long, cold Minnesota winter? So Vujovich constructed an open-sided—but covered and significantly shortened—eight-foot walkway, with steps down to the garden, to meet the legal requirement of separation, then, using the remaining space, added the yearned-for mudroom and powder room to the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44 ➔





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## SUMMER HOME & GARDEN



Photos by Troy Theis

back of the existing house to create a footprint for these new features as well as lessen the outdoor commute.

These rooms led into the new family room-cum-informal kitchen—a renovation rather than addition. “It was hard to get an open concept into the existing home, so we changed it dramatically, creating a separate, informal pod,” Ed explains. Planned with an open, relaxed and airy feel with lots of windows amid white walls and cabinets, the former kitchen was gutted and revamped to better suit a 21st century way of living and the needs of the owners—a cozy, comfortable sanctuary for family life, yet big and well-equipped enough for caterers to function when the couple entertained formally.

Each of Vujovich’s projects has its own designated project manager, and this point person guides the client in choosing design features. “We take them to showrooms where we have relationships with their various professionals, who sit down with them and discuss, say, how they use their kitchen on an everyday basis, and with guests. While we gutted the kitchen here, we kept some of the cabinets and gave them a new, white finish. We added a large center island, which can function as a buffet station for guests but also has seats for the family. They chose stone countertops and stainless steel appliances, including a commercial gas range, and a farm-kitchen, cut-out sink. We refinished the hardwood floor to match the original white oak in other parts of the house.

“An odd existing feature was a large chimney that went from the basement to the roof and right through the kitchen. We removed it, replacing the boiler and mechanicals in the basement, making room for more kitchen cabinets. The adjoining new family room features white built-in bookcases and a gas fireplace.

“A really big part of our job,” Ed continues, “is to organize the design features. For instance, when they pick out a knob, we document the color, size, and brand in case they need the information for replacement later on.”

So, the basement now features new HVAC materials. But it also showcases what, to an outsider, looks like a hotel gym, complete with a huge resistance swimming pool, whirlpool, and hot tub, with an interior window connecting them visually with the exercise room. Natural light filters in via three large window wells.

But to get all that large and heavy equipment below ground was no easy matter. That indoor pool itself weighed in at 3,500 pounds. And remember those city lot constraints? Right. It had to be lifted by crane over the formal garden, past mature oak trees, and down into its own newly constructed basement space. To gain access to the lot’s work area, Vujovich came up with the logistical solution of building a ramp over the formidable retaining wall facing Lake of the Isles Boulevard to permit trucks to deliver the big stuff from the street. (A small section of the formal garden was removed and later replaced by the original landscape firm, Southview Design.)

No one said this would be easy.

Along with the new bedroom for the new baby added on the second floor, a new laundry room was created near it by converting an existing room. Upgraded from the basement, the new (and much more accessible) laundry utilized a former stone kitchen countertop as well. Oh, and the bricks from that dismantled chimney were blended with new ones to cover the new exterior walls, an aesthetically—as well as environmentally—sound decision.

Speaking of the environment, Vujovich prides itself on thinking green “as a part of our company culture,” says Ed. “Many ‘green’ things we do, the client doesn’t even have to be concerned about—for instance, using low/no VOC paint and hardwood floor finishes and no products containing formaldehyde. We use ‘green’ suppliers like Marvin Windows & Doors, which recycles everything; they use every part and piece of a tree.

“There are lots of other ways to save, too,” he continues.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46 ➔





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Bottom line: “We try to focus on the experience of the client. Construction,” he says, “is the easy part. Managing a client is tougher, and it’s the most important part—and something other companies may not stress. Simply creating a beautiful space is easy,” he reiterates. But with Vujovich, it’s not enough.

“The client lives here through the whole process. We like to create ways they can maintain their life patterns in their existing home—for instance, we set up a temporary kitchen, moving their appliances and stuff to another room during con-

struction. Sure, we have quality craftsmen and project managers and great systems for managing the selection of products and a well-honed process for building and remodeling, but our passion and pride come from building relationships—before, during, and after the process. We know it’s stressful, especially the first few days when no one can find their hats and mittens, when there are strange loud noises, and the dog is upset. But we spend time preparing homeowners for the emotional roller-coaster by talking about how the remodeling experience might feel and how keeping the communications flow open can help.”

The TLC pays off. The owners called in Vujovich once again when they wanted an outdoor kitchen built. To date, the company has completed five projects for this client, who clearly cherish their work. ■

## END NOTES

### Thinking of Remodeling/Adding On? Here’s How the Process Works

“Our business usually comes from referrals, says Vujovich’s co-owner, General Manager Ed Roskowsinski. “They know who we are and have seen us around. So, it’s not a challenge for us to justify what we can do. We start by getting together in the client’s home, meeting with all the decision-makers for an hour or two, focusing on goals—not necessarily on the plans themselves. Those goals include things like what they like and don’t like about their current house; the timing and budget of the project; and how they want to experience the house—all to make sure it’s the right fit. The first consultation is always free of cost. Then it’s time for us to start the design process, or consult with their architect (either way is fine with us).

### Typical questions:

- What’s the minimum [job/fee]? “We get asked that all the time. They assume that we deal only with large projects (which is a lot of what we do), but there’s not a minimum: it can depend on the type of home; the neighborhood. The average project runs \$100,000, with kitchen remodeling being the most popular project. We like to deal with historic renovations in architecturally significant homes. If it’s a new home, then one with architectural detail.”
- How long from that first meeting to the shovel in the ground? “Usually about four months, which is actually the time it takes to design a project.”
- Any help securing loans? “We can assist with that. We partner with a broker in Edina, who finds the best mortgage rate. And it’s challenging! In fact, it’s the big-

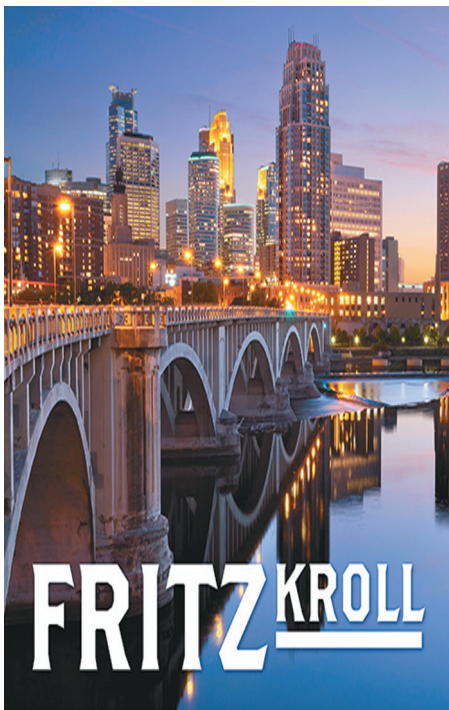
gest challenge in our industry, because appraisals are so low right now—lower than the cost of materials, so there’s a challenge in bridging that. We sit down with the appraiser and show images and ideas to relay that it’s not just based on square footage.”

- My neighbors are going to hate this. “We consider them our future clients, so we want this to be a good experience for them, too. We send letters asking them to call us with any issues because we certainly don’t want to create any animosity.” And Vujovich doesn’t like McMansions any more than you do. “We’re big proponents of ‘building right.’ Our philosophy is, build smaller but build better. An addition isn’t always the right answer. We’ll visit and ask, ‘If you have any unused space, why add more?’ Maybe the formal dining room can become the family room rather than adding an extension.”

- Do you offer warranties? “The State of Minnesota requires a two-year warranty on construction defects and 12 years on equipment. We go beyond that because we’re focused on relationships. We’ll come back in five, ten years if something didn’t hold up as we’d expected.”

- The Recession hurt most builders. What about you? “Fortunately, we have groupies; that’s exciting, and that’s part of what we do—build relationships. So when business fell off a bit, we’d send out an email blast to former customers letting them know we had a few time slots available in case they’d been thinking about a project. And we got a very good response. Being really good friends with our clients is part of the fun, watching their kids grow up. Then those kids buy houses of their own and call us.”





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Catherine and Mel with one of their dogs, Max. Photos by Mike Hnida

## AN ARTISTIC SOLUTION TO A PRACTICAL NEED

by Kathleen Watson

“Good fences make good neighbors.” Though Robert Frost penned those words long before our time, this phrase calls to mind a fence in our community that has everyone talking. As part of a personal landscaping project designed and built by Mel and Catherine Lleras, this fence is more than just a wooden privacy barrier; it is a work of art itself. Complete with garden boxes and handmade stained glass pieces, this cedar fence is functional and aesthetically pleasing—no matter what side of the fence you’re on.

In order to keep their three puppies safe and contained, Mel and Catherine knew they needed a fence. Several years ago, Mel (a licensed structural designer and builder) promised to use his woodworking skills

to create a fence for Catherine as a gift. But an ordinary fence wouldn’t do; the couple wanted something that would create a tranquil and happy atmosphere for their backyard while providing a certain amount of privacy. Working together, Mel and Catherine utilized their shared interest in design to create a fence that surrounds their home with beauty.

Made from cedar, the fence consists of latticed panels and traditional panels with stained glass insets. Catherine notes that the alternating panels keep the space open. Garden boxes run along the bottom and middle of the fence, which allow Catherine to plant her favorite flowers. Mel notes that it’s important for him to honor the space he’s working in by embracing existing natu-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 50 ➔





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ral elements. This feeling encouraged him to incorporate an existing tree into the fence line instead of having it removed. Mel's future plans for the area include a waterfall that will flow around the tree and into a handmade bamboo arbor.

When Catherine sees the fence, she is reminded of Mel's love and thoughtfulness. "I feel the loving energy that Mel built into the fence for me...a gift for me and our family. Every time I look at a piece, I remember the immense thoughtfulness put into it." Mel acknowledges that Catherine and their family was the inspiration for the design, adding, "It's a creation born of how I feel about them in combination with the type of energy and experiences I felt Catherine needed to be able to take in."

Although Mel and his core group of subcontractors provided the physical labor and professional building skills to pull off their project, Mel and Catherine worked together to design the fence. Mel notes, "My wife is an integral part of the conception process. We think differently so when we start a project together, we're coming at it from two different angles. In every case, we've found that when we work together the project ends up pretty amazing."

With regard to his personal design style, Mel says, "I tend to start with the big picture and then focus on the details that will create an experience within that big picture. Experiencing [different aspects of] life through my senses is very important to me, so I try to create spaces where other people can also stop and just experience the moment. I know most people just see a fence, but I see a transformation of the surrounding energy."

Though the fence is one of Mel's most well-known projects, Mel's talents span far beyond the fence in his backyard. Other clients have utilized Mel's skills to create patios, arbors, custom furniture, and wall murals. Regardless of the

project, Mel knows it's important to understand the purpose for the piece as well the underlying "why beyond the why." Mel likes to get to know the clients so he can "get a glimpse of their primal needs." He explains that he knew why his wife wanted the fence, but he also recognized that her fast-paced life carried into the home. Mel says, "I knew the real goal was to provide a sanctuary where she can find peace of mind and decompress."

Mel's attention to his clients' needs and wants requires that he only take on one sizeable project at a time. This allows him to give the project at hand his undivided attention, guaranteeing that each product is exactly what his clients want and need. He adds, "Sometimes this means potential clients have to wait a bit before I can start their project, but so far everybody has considered my work to be worth it. Yeah, I'm totally tootin' my own horn there."

Since each project Mel takes on is completely unique, Mel works closely with his clients to create his project bids. Although he understands that some people want set pricing, he notes that it's not practical for such custom projects. "If you want to work with me, you're not working with somebody who uses the same template for every home they work on. You're working with somebody who's going to bring something out of your home and present it to you as a gift in a different form." Mel believes that the value his projects bring to their environments is worth more than the price of the project itself. As with his personal fence, the presence of a work of art is invaluable.

Mel's business, Mel Lleras LLC, was established in July of 2013. For more information, or to ask Mel how his designs can enhance your space, email Mel at [mel@modern-toolbox.org](mailto:mel@modern-toolbox.org) or call (763) 447-1389. See more photos online at [www.LavenderMagazine.com](http://www.LavenderMagazine.com). ■

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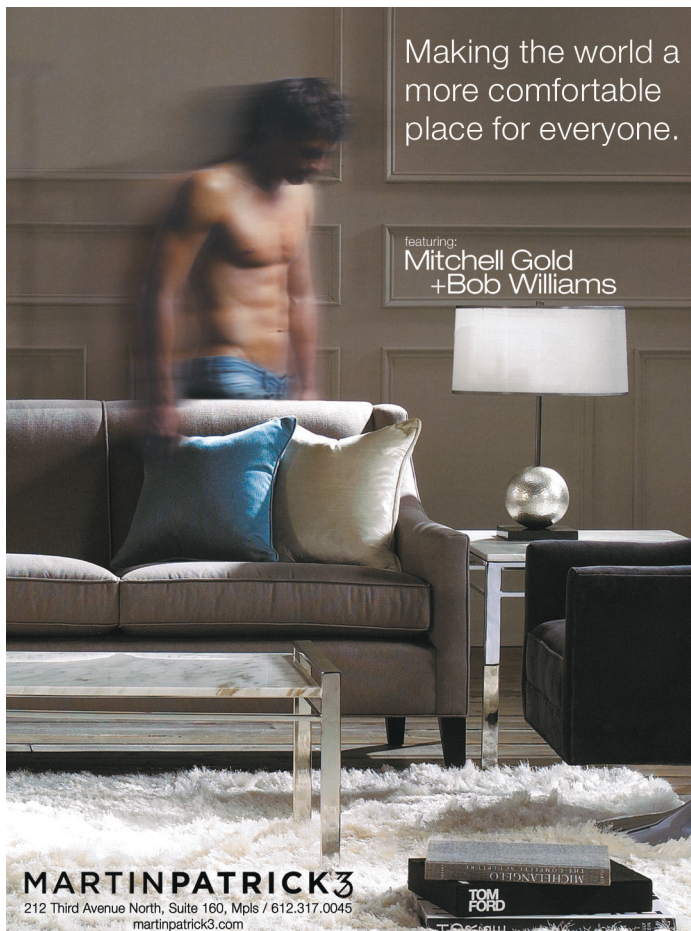
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# VINE ART

TURNING THE UGLY INTO THE BEAUTIFUL

*by Shane Lueck*

Picture it: you're walking through the woods and you happen upon a group of tear drops made of vines hanging from the trees. Is this the work of wood nymphs? Garden gnomes? Aliens?

David Cook, the artist behind last summer's flower bomb-

ing, has shifted gears to create these natural works of art. "I've been building a sculpture garden deep in the woods in Hastings using vines," he says. "It's getting bigger and bigger—I'm cleaning out the forest to make room for my giant figures (flowers, crosses, stylized trees, spheres, angels, butterfly's, etc.). I



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## SUMMER HOME & GARDEN

"IT'S GETTING BIGGER AND BIGGER—I'M CLEANING OUT THE FOREST TO MAKE ROOM FOR MY GIANT FIGURES."



(Previous): Teardrops in the forest. (This page, l-r): Teardrops in Hastings; Cook with his art. Photos courtesy of David Cook

decided to make teardrops for a great addition."

Discovering that he could hang them from trees to look like giant teardrops (or raindrops), Cook says they make a beautiful installation in a garden. Cook, who still flowers bombs on a less frequent basis than last summer, finds his work with the vines to be very opposite from his colorful flowers. He says, "Maybe I needed to switch gears and be monochromatic and use natural materials: earth. I'm also helping the trees from being choked by the vines. Turning the ugly into the beautiful."

Creating these vine sculptures is a labor of love. Cook drives his truck around the woods, on the lookout for vines. "Many areas I've already pulled all of the vines so I have to keep exploring other areas," he says. "I pull the vines from the trees and sometimes dead branches come with them. I've been hit on the head many times, so I really have to be careful."

Taking the vines back to his studio or garden, Cook gets to work. Without the use of an armature (a framework around which a sculpture is built), Cook creates his teardrops free form. A mid-size drop takes about two days to complete, during which Cook says he will usually pull an

all-nighter. "Then I'm more manic and the lines are much more free and not so contrived," he explains. "They have more energy. People have also inquired about making them into chandeliers!"

Being that the sculptures take the form of teardrops, there must be some meaning behind them, right? Like a singer's soulful ballad, the teardrops must be the work of sorrow. But that's not the case. According to Cook, there's really no meaning behind them. He jokes, "Maybe my tears? I don't know...haven't cried in eight years."

Anyone looking to add one of Cook's teardrops to their own garden is encouraged to head to Hastings to view his garden in the woods and the sculptures in order to choose one to take home. Although Cook could load one on his truck to deliver, he says, "People have to see them and decide which one. They would definitely be limited numbers because I'm the only one who can make these. They're basically buying a sculpture from me that will last forever in the elements."

Starting at \$275, inquiries about Cook's teardrops can be directed at Cook by calling him (612-916-8731) or by visiting his website ([www.flowerbomber.com](http://www.flowerbomber.com)). ■





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# Subaru XV Crosstrek



We know you have been waiting for this review for a very long time.

How do we know? Some time ago, we conducted a survey about the kind of automobiles you like and own. By a huge margin, you said that you either own a Subaru or love them to pieces. That got us wondering when we will ever get a Subaru to review and put on these pages for you to read...

Finally, a Subaru was sent our way. We probably wanted to get an Outback or a Forester, the brand's two most popular vehicles in the lineup. We also know those two models are very popular amongst GLBT automobile owners. Yet, we did not get either of them. We

apologize for this.

Actually, we sort of expected what we got. The compact hatchback you are seeing is what is called the XV Crosstrek. It looks like the current Impreza hatchback, but with plenty of differences. In fact, the XV Crosstrek is the third-best-selling Subaru in the USA behind the Outback and Forester. You might just be one of its owners.

Now that we have a Subaru to review, we'd better tell you what the XV Crosstrek is like.

From the outside, the difference between the Impreza hatchback and the XV Crosstrek is the ride height: 8.7-inches from ground to floor on the latter model. Larger tires and

wheels fill in the space, following the convention of its predecessor, the Outback Sport. The XV Crosstrek gets a specific grille, black lower grille protection, extended wheel arches, and a black roof rack. Some of the good parts of the Impreza are retained, such as wide opening doors and a good-sized liftgate.

On the Hybrid model—the first by Subaru to be sold in this country—there are also other differences that the trained eye should look out for. Special taillights using a more energy-efficient design separate it from the standard XV Crosstrek models. The Hybrid badges are subtle, but you do get something exclusive over the regular XV Crosstreks; Plasma Green,



as on our tester. There are specific 17-inch alloy wheels for the Hybrid, shod with Yokohama Geolander all-season tires.

The XV Crosstrek has a spacious cabin and good cargo space. The Touring's standard leather front seating is comfortable and big, with the right manual adjustments needed to get comfortable. Rear seating will surprise you, as it offers good leg and headroom for folks up to six-foot-two-inches. The rear seatbacks fold down 60/40, providing expansive cargo space for a long weekend getaway or to haul some major shopping home. Keep the rear seatbacks up and it is good enough for a family weekender.

Being a hybrid, the XV Crosstrek's instrumentation reminds you that it is sustainable with blue accented lighting. A digital display has trip functions, along with the fuel gauge and transmission readout settled in-between the speedometer and tachometer. A small screen mounted high and far on the center stack doubles as the rearview camera screen as well as multiple trip, vehicle function, and hybrid system readouts. The reversing screen is really small to truly see what is behind you, but the other informational screens provide good information through readable displays. The system readouts are controlled from the steering wheel by a few switches, as are audio and cruise controls.

Infotainment is provided through a combination of HD Radio, SiriusXM satellite radio, Blue-

tooth connectivity for music files and phone calls, and satellite navigation. Via Bluetooth or the USB connection, you can also use the Aha app from your smartphone to stream content ranging from custom radio stations, select CBS Radio affiliates, to podcasts. Sound quality is quite good through six speakers strategically positioned throughout the cabin. The navigation system is very accurate with good quality readouts.

The XV Crosstrek starts with a 2.0-liter horizontally opposed four-cylinder engine, also known as a "boxer." While the standard engine works well by itself, the Hybrid adds an electric motor facilitating a low speed electric mode, regenerative braking, and a stop-start system. Power comes from a "traction battery," feeding to the electric motor in concert with the boxer engine. Total power came to 160 horsepower with 163 pound-feet of torque. A continuously variable transmission facilitates power to the XV Crosstrek's standard Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive system. If you chose a model without the electric motor, you will only get 148 horsepower from the standard boxer engine.

On the road, the XV Crosstrek Hybrid runs smoothly, though the ride is on the soft side. It also yielded some lean and roll in the corners, but the XV Crosstrek Hybrid had it all under control even with 8.7-inches of ground clearance. Steering feel is just right, not too loose or tight. Steering is sensitive, but on point with

good response from the wheel. Stopping power is also fine in both normal and panic situations.

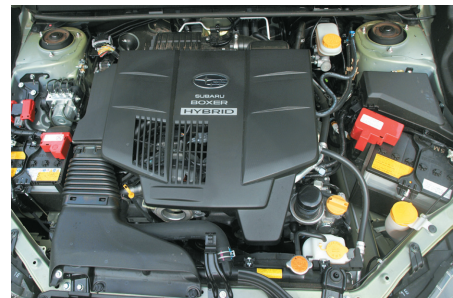
During its time with us, it went off-roading. Though the Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive does not have any settings for high- or low-range or electric hill decent control, a steady right foot is all you need to compensate on the rougher spots. The 8.7-inches of ground clearance allows the XV Crosstrek to work through uneven surfaces and rougher trails.

It is expected for any hybrid to deliver superior fuel economy. For a 3,484-pound compact crossover hatchback, the XV Crosstrek Hybrid delivered an average of 27.3MPG. The sticker states that the XV Crosstrek Hybrid would average 31MPG.

A basic XV Crosstrek starts out at \$22,700 with the 148-horsepower boxer engine and a manual gearbox. Our Hybrid Touring tester came to \$30,120, the highest price to pay for an XV Crosstrek.

Simply put, the XV Crosstrek is the car you want if you love the Outback and Forester, without needing all of that cargo space. It is really an all-weather runabout that can go further off track, as well as get groceries and new foliage for the home. The Hybrid system is a decent first effort by Subaru. Yet, it will need refinement if it is to enable better fuel economy and efficient operation.

Then again, we would buy any XV Crosstrek simply for what it could do for us: anything. ■



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# Jasmine

"There they are!"

I watched an eight-year-old pointer finger shoot toward a cloudless sky. Squinting with 57-year-old eyes, I spotted two bald eagles soaring high above the Stone Arch Bridge. The Mississippi, swollen from spring rains, flowed in grand splendor below.

We'd been here before, sitting on the puffy green hillside next to the Guthrie Theater. Last year, in nearly the same spot, my Little Sister Jasmine—as in Big Brothers Big Sisters Little Sister—spotted the birds for the first time.

Naturally, the eagles needed names. "That one there is 'Candy,'" Jasmine said just as the eagle swooped low. A second later, another magnificent display of white crown and tail feathers followed.

"Hot Dog," she proclaimed.

With that, it was official.

Now we were back, year two of a special friendship and bald eagle watching.

We were doing it in grand style, too. Jasmine held a melting Izzy's mocha and chocolate ice cream cone. I had a couple licks left to a monster-sized chocolate chip cookie-ice cream sandwich.

It was all quite wonderful.

I became Jasmine's Big Sister by accident. There's a push to increase diversity in Minneapolis' legal ranks; one initiative is a "pipeline" to help inner city youth become more interested in legal careers. The plan is to mentor to high school students as they finish secondary school and go on to college.

I was told I'd be the first transgender "Big" that Big Brothers Big Sisters would ever match with a "Little." The agency would need to find the right child and family, people open to someone who appeared feminine but sounded like a man.

When I got the call from the agency, it wasn't about a high schooler at all, but instead a seven-year-old girl. "I think you'll really like her, Ellie," the woman on the other end of the phone said. "She likes to go to museums. Plus, she needs someone strong like you."

Not what I had planned age-wise. I asked whether being a transgender woman would be a problem.

"No, not all," the agency person said. "Mom and Little are open to you."

On a cold snowy evening in December 2012, I met Jasmine for the first time. She held a drawing of a tall woman with flowing blonde hair. "Ellie" was written in glitter on the woman's dress.

"I knew that you'd be beautiful," Jasmine said.

This kinky-haired cocoa-colored angel of a human made me smile for what would be the first of ten thousand smiles. I was hooked.

In 18 months, we've done the gambit—Chuck E Cheese, movies, an

afternoon at Lake Calhoun ("watch me stand on my hands underwater, Ellie!"), the aquarium at the Mall of America, gutter ball bowling at Bryant Lake Bowl.

One day Jasmine asked, "Can we go to the Walker?"

It was music to my ears.

A half-hour later, Jasmine bounded up steps to an exhibit of a twenty-foot tall table and chairs. From there, we went room to room as she commented on funny or odd art pieces, mainstays of the Walker's permanent collection.

As advertised, Jasmine's a museum junkie. We've been to the State History Museum twice and the MIA once.

By now, you get it that for a (now) eight-year-old, Jasmine's pretty darn smart. She reads billboards as we drive from point A to B. Time and again, she nails it.

We play our own game, "perception." It's about connecting dots based on bits of information and then inferring how they're related—for example, whether certain styles of gift bags sitting on tables at Chuck E. Cheese are for boys or girls. Or that the rainbow flag five houses down means that a GLBT family lives there.

Yes, I'm working on honing Jasmine's legal deductive reasoning skill-set already. Please don't let her know that.

One Sunday Jasmine and I toured Augsburg College with my daughter Lily, then an Augsburg student, as tour guide. I watched saucer eyes grow bigger and bigger as we went from dorm room to student union to cafeteria and then library. By the end of the tour, I heard, "This is where I'm going to college!"

My question: "What will it take for you to get here, Jasmine?"

She didn't hesitate. "Hard work. It will take hard work, Ellie."

At that point, Lily (who's long heard such things from me) turned and gave Jasmine a high five.

For me, it was a moment of sheer delight.

When I went through "Big" training, I repeatedly heard how I'd be giving a child the gift of my time. They praised us for volunteering; I'm sure so that we would stick with the program.

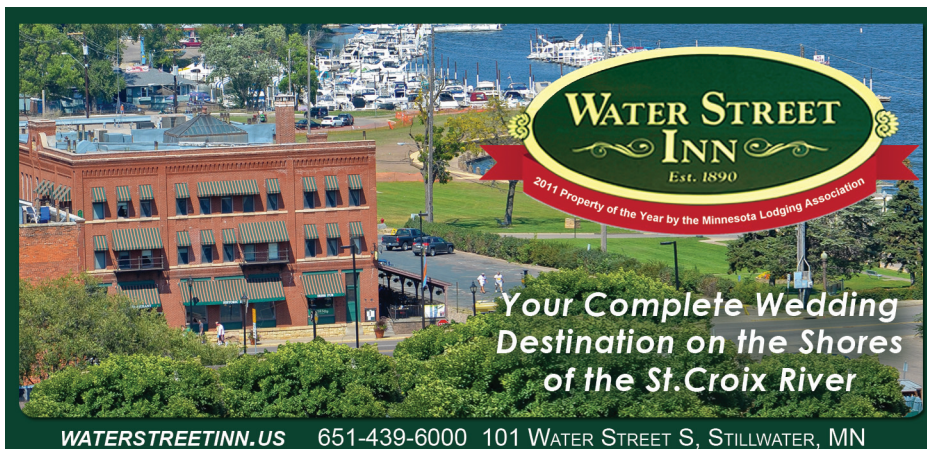
What the agency didn't mention was how my life would be profoundly changed by an eight-year-old kinky-haired girl. I hadn't ever experienced such complete acceptance by someone so young.

Jasmine doesn't care that I'm a transwoman.

She only cares that I show up in her life.

It's exactly as Jasmine said to me the other day. "We're on a journey together, Ellie, you and me."

What a beautiful journey it's turning out to be. ■



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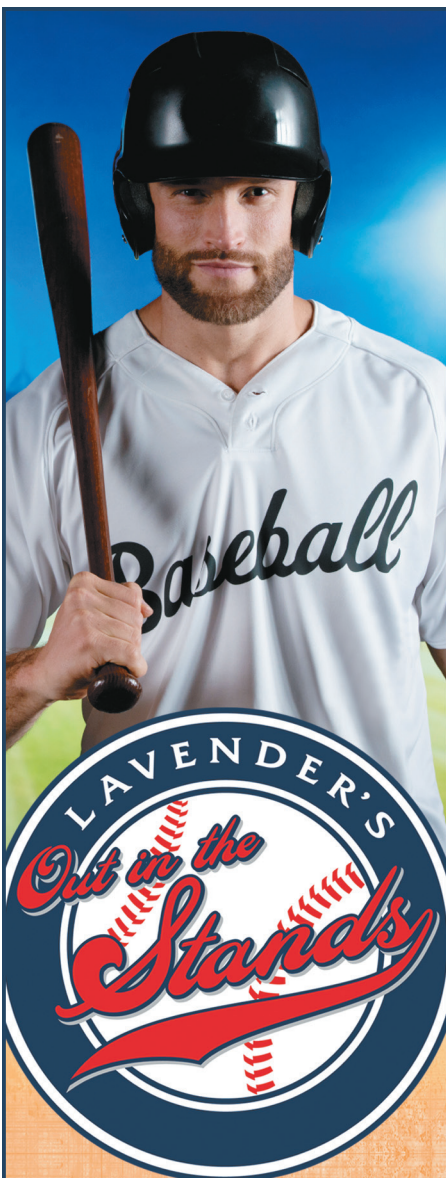
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# What Happens in Vegas (better happen before 9 p.m.)—Part 2

*(In our first installment, we found our heroines fretting about their advancing age during a trip to Las Vegas. In part 2, we learn what happens when they try to reclaim their youth at a lesbian hot spot.)*

The lesbian nightclub didn't open until 9 p.m., which proved to be the first challenge of the evening. Ingrid's usual bedtime is 8 p.m., so I had to pump her full of frozen cocktails to keep her awake. The high-fructose blast transformed her into a jittery, manic monster. They also made her smell like rancid cough medicine.

I had been to gay bars in recent history, but it had been years since I'd gone with the intent of proving my desirability. Given that I would be accompanied by a middle-aged woman with dilated pupils and sugar-fueled facial twitches, I suspected the we'd only capture the ardor of crackheads, and the evening would end with us locked in the trunk of a car.

"Maybe we should just stay at the hotel tonight and catch one of the lounge acts," I suggested.

"No way!" Ingrid snapped. Her tall, angular body was stiffly bouncing around our room like a deranged rectangle. "I want to dance!"

About an hour later, we entered the nightclub. Ingrid's sugar buzz was wearing thin and she was becoming grouchy.

"We're the oldest women here by far," she complained.

"That's not true. Look at that one over on the bar stool," I said, pointing to a stout, wrinkly figure in the distance.

"That's not a woman! That's someone's leather purse," Ingrid sighed.

Ingrid and I first met when we were in our mid-20s. We immediately bonded over our shared impishness, and we leveraged our collective charm and devilish good looks to make a harrowing decade-long series of poor romantic choices. Exhausted by our bad behavior, we hid out in longish-term relationships for another decade, and now, nearing 50,

found ourselves yearning for our roughish past.

"Do you remember how we used to let a girl know we were interested?" asked Ingrid, as we huddled on bar stools and gazed at the undulating mass of 20-somethings on the dance floor. "It had something to do with eye contact, right? I'd pluck one from the herd and stare her down until she spoke to me. If I did that tonight, I'm pretty sure she'd just call the cops and charge me with creepy old-ladyness."

"True, we are hideous. But we now have something very powerful that we didn't have when we were kids." I fished into my purse and pulled out my American Express card. "A large, disposable income."

In no time, we were surrounded by kids anxious to cage free drinks. Unfortunately, I was so distracted by my newfound popularity that I didn't notice that Ingrid had started slamming rum drinks again.

Soon, she was on the dance floor, gyrating wildly with a gaggle of drunken acolytes. In the dim lighting, she looked just the way she did when I first met her—the tall, blonde embodiment of a valkyrie of Norse legend. According to that myth, the bewitching valkyrie were tasked with choosing who would die in battle. Back in the day, Ingrid embraced that role, casually selecting a new heart to slay every weekend. But, now, she was woefully out of practice and too hopped up on frozen daiquiris to think clearly.

When I spotted her locking eyes with a fawn-like creature surrounded by an honor guard of lady rugby players, I knew we were in trouble. As she moved in to claim her prize, the rugby team chased us out of the bar.

As we hit the bright lights of the Vegas strip, the women suddenly stopped their pursuit. "They're old! Stop chasing them!" the team captain commanded upon seeing us in the searing glow of neon. "One of them might break a hip." ■

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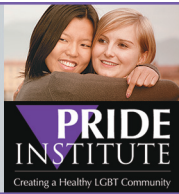
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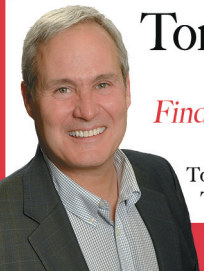


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1400 Park Ave.  
Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 373-AIDS (metro) or  
(800) 248-AIDS (statewide)  
[mapaidline@mnaidspj.org](mailto:mapaidline@mnaidspj.org)  
[www.mnaidspj.org](http://www.mnaidspj.org)

### Park House

Day Health / Mental Health Treatment Program for Adults Living with HIV/AIDS.  
710 E. 24th Street, Suite 303  
Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 871-1264  
[www.allina.com/ahs/anw.nsf/page/park\\_house\\_home](http://www.allina.com/ahs/anw.nsf/page/park_house_home)

### U of MN HIV Research Studies

Looking for HIV+ and HIV- individuals to participate in research studies.  
420 Delaware St. SE  
Minneapolis, MN 55455  
(612) 625-7472  
[hiv.umn.edu](http://hiv.umn.edu)

## CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAUS

### Meet Minneapolis

Convention & Visitor Association. Free wedding service available!  
250 Marquette Ave. S., Ste. 1300  
Minneapolis, MN 55401  
(888) 676-6757  
[www.minneapolis.org](http://www.minneapolis.org)

## BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS

### Twin Cities Quorum

Your GLBTQA chamber of commerce working to invigorate, build and partner for a diverse business community.  
(612) 399-6827  
[www.twincitiesquorum.com](http://www.twincitiesquorum.com)

## EDUCATION

### William Mitchell College of Law

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St. Paul, MN 55105  
1-(888)-962-5529  
[www.wmitchell.edu](http://www.wmitchell.edu)

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2600 Park Ave. S.  
Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 870-3368  
[www.asimn.org](http://www.asimn.org)

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### YWCA of Minneapolis

Serving men, women and families in an inclusive, welcoming environment. Locations in Downtown, Uptown, Midtown.  
1130 Nicollet Mall  
Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 215-4118  
[www.ywcamps.org](http://www.ywcamps.org)

## GLBT HOMELESS YOUTH

### GLBT Host Home Program of Avenues for Homeless Youth

Securing host homes for GLBT youth experiencing homelessness. Contact us to host or donate.  
1708 Oak Park Ave. N.  
Minneapolis, MN 55411  
(612) 522-1690  
[www.GLBTHostHome.org](http://www.GLBTHostHome.org)

## HEALTH & WELLNESS

### Fairview Clinics

More than 40 locations offering same-day appointments, extended hours and 24/7 scheduling.  
2450 Riverside Ave.  
Minneapolis, MN 55454  
(855) 324-7843  
[www.fairview.org/clinic](http://www.fairview.org/clinic)

### Family Tree Clinic

LGBTQ Health Matters at Family Tree! Offering respectful, affordable sexual health services to meet your needs.  
1619 Dayton Ave.  
St. Paul, MN  
(651) 645-0478  
[www.familytreeclinic.org](http://www.familytreeclinic.org)

### HIM Program / Red Door Services

Hennepin County Public Health Clinic  
525 Portland Ave. S, 4th Floor  
Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 348-9100  
[www.HIMprogram.org](http://www.HIMprogram.org)  
[facebook.com/HIMProgram](https://facebook.com/HIMProgram)  
[www.capsprogram.org](http://www.capsprogram.org)

## LIBRARY

### Quatrefoil Library

Your GLBT Library with stacks of DVDs, books, and magazines. Check out our online catalogue.  
1220 E. Lake St.  
Minneapolis, MN 55407  
(612) 729-2543  
[www.qlibrary.org](http://www.qlibrary.org)

## MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS

### MPR & The Current

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480 Cedar St.  
St. Paul, MN 55101  
(651) 290-1500  
[www.mpr.org](http://www.mpr.org)

### Radio K 770

Radio K is the student-run radio station of the University of Minnesota  
330 21st Ave. S.  
610 Rarig Center  
University of Minnesota  
Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 625-3500  
[www.radiok.org](http://www.radiok.org)

## MUSEUM

### Minnesota Historical Society Sites & Museums

Make the Minnesota Historical Society's 26 historic sites and museums part of your vacation plans. Like Split Rock Lighthouse, Mill City Museum, Minnesota History Center, Northwest Company Fur Post, James J. Hill House and Historic Fort Snelling. They're located all around the state. Learn more at [www.visitMNhistory.org](http://www.visitMNhistory.org)

### Weisman Art Museum

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333 E. River Rd.  
Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 625-9494  
[www.wam.umn.edu](http://www.wam.umn.edu)

## PERFORMING ARTS

### Children's Theatre Company

North America's flagship theatre for young audiences and families, offering year-round live theatre for ages 2-18.  
2400 3rd Ave. S.  
Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 874-0400  
[www.childrenstheatre.org](http://www.childrenstheatre.org)

### Cowles Center for Dance and Performing Arts

The Cowles Center is the Twin Cities' flagship for the creation, performance, education, and celebration of dance.  
528 Hennepin Ave.  
Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 206-3600  
[www.thecowlescenter.org](http://www.thecowlescenter.org)

### Hennepin Theatre Trust

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1-800-982-2787  
[www.HennepinTheatreTrust.org](http://www.HennepinTheatreTrust.org)

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528 Hennepin Ave., 8th Fl.  
Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 339-4944  
[www.illusiontheater.org](http://www.illusiontheater.org)

### Jungle Theater

Professional theater producing contemporary and classic works in an intimate setting in the Lynlake neighborhood.  
2951 Lyndale Ave. S. Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 822-7063  
[www.JungleTheater.com](http://www.JungleTheater.com)

### Minnesota Orchestra

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1111 Nicollet Mall  
Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 371-5656  
(800) 292-4141  
[www.minnesotaorchestra.org](http://www.minnesotaorchestra.org)

### Mixed Blood Theatre

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1501 S. 4th St.  
Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 338-0937  
[www.mixedblood.com](http://www.mixedblood.com)

### Northrop - University of Minnesota

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84 Church St. SE  
Minneapolis, MN 55414  
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[northrop.umn.edu](http://northrop.umn.edu)



## COMMUNITY CONNECTION

### **Ordway Center for the Performing Arts**

Hosting, presenting, and creating performing arts and educational programs that enrich diverse audiences.

345 Washington St.  
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(651) 224-4222  
www.ordway.org

### **She Rock She Rock**

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5115 Excelsior Blvd. #316  
Minneapolis, MN 55416  
jenny@sherocksherock.com  
www.sherocksherock.com

### **Theater Latté Da**

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www.latteda.org

### **Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus**

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528 Hennepin Ave., Suite 307  
Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 339-SONG (7664)  
chorus@tcgmc.org  
www.tcgmc.org

### **PET SERVICES**

#### **Animal Humane Society**

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(763) 522-4325  
www.animalhumanesociety.org

#### **Northern Lights Greyhound Adoption**

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www.nlga-mn.org

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P.O. Box 50608  
Minneapolis, MN  
www.twincities.hrc.org  
www.hrc.org

#### **OutFront Minnesota**

Delivering programs/services in the area of public policy, anti-violence, education, training and law.

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Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 822-0127  
www.outfront.org

### **PRIDE**

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www.tcpride.org

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www.agcmcc.org

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(612) 870-4416  
www.centralmpls.org

#### **Edina Community Lutheran Church**

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4113 W. 54th St.  
Edina, MN  
(952) 926-3808  
www.eclc.org

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Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 870-1868  
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www.hennepinchurch.org

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www.hohchurch.org

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www.mayflowermpls.org

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www.mnrcumc.org

#### **Westminster Presbyterian Church**

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Nicollet Mall at 12th St.  
Minneapolis, MN  
(612) 332-3421  
www.westminstermpls.org

### **SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS**

#### **Minneapolis Movie Bears**

Social networking organization catering to the GLBT community for movies, theater, games and fun.

2830 W. 70 1/2 St.  
Richfield, MN 55423  
(612) 327-5340  
www.minneapolismoviebears.com

### **SPORTS & RECREATION**

#### **Twin Cities Goodtime Softball League (TCGSL)**

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# f\*\*k brownies

September 2013. 7:00. Humid night. I'm sitting at my dining table, posing in front of my laptop for a picture to post on Facebook. I want the world to see how excited I am about my date tonight, and to prove that even the youngest old maid can find a man.

I've been seeing "Matt" for two weeks. We've been on 11 dates in 14 days. He's the kind of guy you know you'll never find: amazing on paper *and* in real life. He's the first man who puts checkmarks against all of my man-criteria, and he adds checkmarks to boxes I didn't know I had. I've never found anyone who's been everything I wanted; Matt's aced the course with extra credit.

Our dates go alarmingly well. Our relationship is more intense than it should be, perhaps dangerously so, and I know that slowing things down is appropriate—he agrees—but we're infatuated and there's no stopping us.

Matt makes me laugh, we already have inside jokes, and he's an amazing cuddler. When he's not around, I imagine what our wedding will look like and how many dogs we'll have.

Fast forward an hour and a half and Matt's sitting at my kitchen bar with a beer. We're laughing about something ridiculous and I'm reading the back of a box of brownie mix. *"Amazing dessert in three steps: heat, stir, bake."*

Step 1. Heat. My baking dish is greased and my oven is preheated. *Check.*

Step 2. Stir. My eggs, oil, water, *extra* butter, and baking mix are stirred. *Check.*

Step 3. Bake for 24-26 minutes.

I put the brownies in my oven, set the timer on my stove, and the countdown to our sinister climax commences. T-minus 25 minutes.

"You know the best way to a man's heart is through his stomach," I say. Cliché, yeah yeah.

Matt fake laughs and stands up from the bar. He takes me in his arms and we kiss.

We make our way to my sofa and lie down. His body is heavy on mine. His arms are big, his tongue is strong. The man is a MAN.

T-minus 5.

We're lying at opposite ends of the couch. I'm massaging his feet. We're listening to music from my laptop. "Falling in Love at a Coffee Shop" by Landon Pigg.

"I think that possibly, maybe I'm falling for you/

Yes, there's a chance I've fallen quite hard over you."

It's an intense song for so early on in a relationship—no, no. Not "relationship." Too soon. But is it possible I'm falling in love with him? No. I'm not in love. I'm infatuated. And we aren't in a relationship. We're dating.

We're moving too fast. Or maybe it's just me. Maybe I've forced the rapidity. Maybe I'm the guy I've always been afraid of dating: selfish and desperate.

But Matt is so handsome. And charming. And romantic. And wonderful and professional and well put together and gentlemanly and courtship-y and—

"Gosh, I don't want to cry," he says.

Um...

What?

Cry? Why would he cry?

T-minus 30 seconds.

He gives me that look. *That* look. The look that says, "You're great, but..."

Boys don't give me that look. *I* give boys that look. My mother taught me as much. You didn't break *her* heart. She broke *yours*. I feel my ego shrinking. I know what's coming. I'm suddenly falling off a cliff, grabbing at branch-

es to break my fall, conceit and cockiness included.

"I don't think this is going to work out," he says.

A loud noise pierces my ears. Beeping from my oven. Step 3 is complete. *Check.*

I'm dizzy. I look around my apartment, at the exposed piping on my ceiling, at my crookedly hung television and the small collection of DVDs underneath. Everything blurs together and I stare into nothing.

"But...But...Wait. What," I say, or ask, or state, or whine. I don't know which.

He sits up. My oven yells at me from my kitchen: *Beep! Beep! Brownies are done!*

"But why?" I ask, "I mean, I...Um. I don't—I meant...What? Why? We can work this out."

Stars cross my vision.

"Everything is going so well," I plead.

From my oven: *OPEN ME GODDAMMIT! I HAVE BROWNIES!*

I'm not upset because I'm not sure what's happening. I'm sick. I know I feel sick. And I sure as hell don't want any damn brownies.

"Wait, so, um, I guess...I mean, you aren't attracted to me anymore?"

"No," he says. "I should leave."

He stands, slips on his shoes, and walks out of my apartment, leaving behind not so much as a goodbye. What the hell?


From my kitchen: *Beep! Beep! BEEP! BEEP! OPEN ME! I HAVE BROWNIES!*

I look toward my oven. "0:00" flashes on the timer. My head hurts.

You know what? Fuck brownies. ■

*ThroughTheseEyes.JustinJones@gmail.com*





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